

EDITORIAL

Self-policing protesters

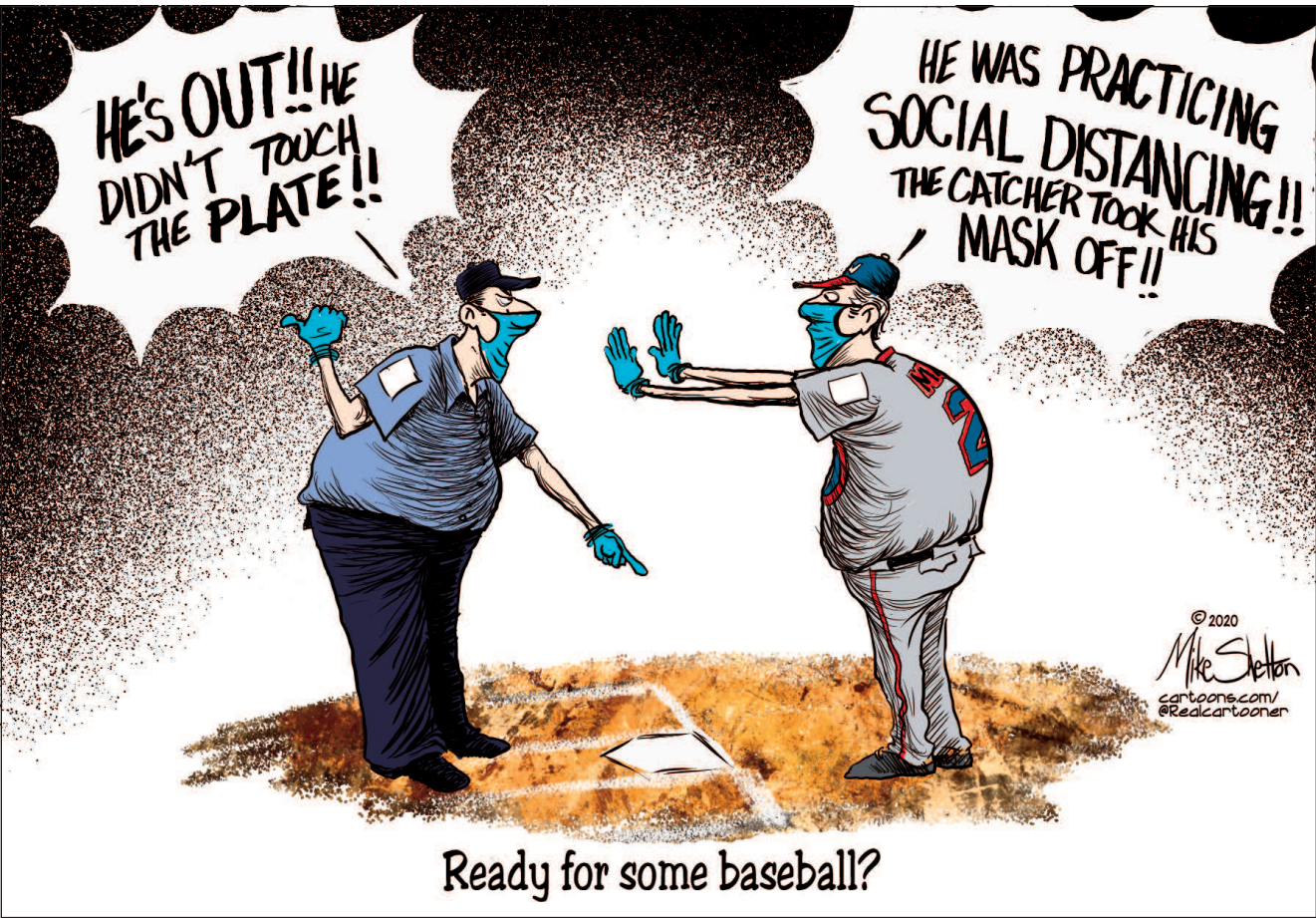
The protesters who gather nightly in downtown Portland should start carrying fire extinguishers as well as signs. The vast majority of the protesters, based on a review of videos, are not igniting fires. And it seems reasonable to believe that many protesters resent the relative handful among them who aren't content with exercising their constitutional right to peacefully assemble but who insist on achieving actual combustion. The fires not only carry no discernible message (unlike, say, a sign or a shouted slogan), but they're likely to provoke a response from police, who have a duty to protect people and property, both of which can be harmed by flames. If the earnest protesters could extinguish some of the blazes quickly, they might help to avoid the violent clashes that have marred the demonstrations and muddled its messages about racial equality and police misconduct.

A level of self-policing among the protesters might also help them achieve what seems to be their main current goal, which is to convince President Donald Trump to recall the federal agents he sent earlier this month to protect the federal Mark O. Hatfield Courthouse. That decision, on its face, is reasonable. No one can dispute that people have damaged the Courthouse, and there seems little reason to believe that Portland Police were likely to prevent more of the same. But there's also ample evidence — much of it, again, captured on video — that federal agents, however successful they might be at reducing damage to a single building, have inflamed rather than calmed the situation.

Still and all, it would be refreshing to hear the protesters chant something along the lines of "We come in peace, stop the burning." That, at least, should be a sentiment everyone, save for the few cretins who want to destroy rather than to build, can endorse.

A truly peaceful protest in Portland might be a pipe dream. But such an event would deprive federal agents of any legitimate justification for using force. It would also divert the public's attention from the mayhem and back to the protesters' message.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Ready for some baseball?

Your views

An alternative to the B2H power transmission line

The Saturday, July 18, edition carried an ad paid for by Idaho Power, complete with pretty picture and nebulous blandishments, which tells us hillbillies that our deprived home will be transformed into paradise on earth with the penetration of B2H through our land. I beg to differ, and offer an alternative idea.

The B2H proposal is, as it stands, inefficient, obsolete from the git go, shows little prospect of financial return, destructive, and is a deeply offensive intrusion to many people who live in the affected area. It is also an invasive foot in the door for further utility routing down the proposed corridor. But, if the electrical powers that be insist on running a new utility line through our homes, here is an alternative which may be a better deal all around. Sit down with Union Pacific and propose to supply free power to the railroad in exchange for easement for construction of the power lines along the rail route, and split the cost of electric locomotives and installing of line electrification. Such a move would:

- 1) Eliminate fuel burning motive power on one of UP's most difficult divisions.
- 2) Regenerative braking on the downhills

would return some power to the system. 3) Both preceding points would eliminate or reduce emissions from diesel exhaust and brake smoke. 4) The trains would run quieter. 5) Both Idaho Power and Union Pacific would reap good press and maybe make a few friends. 6) Electric railroads around the world have infrastructures much less tall and intrusive than the proposed B2H towers. Somehow they efficiently transmit great amounts of power at high voltage without ruining the skyline, and operate safely while doing so. 7) The railroad operation would only consume a fraction of the transmitted power, leaving plenty to feed the grid at the other end.

Crazy idea? Maybe. Many people thought Ted Judah was crazy. Ask UP what Theodore Judah did for the railroads.

Buck Pilkenton
Sumpter

Ulysses Grant had foresight about U.S. race relations

Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), 18th president of the United States (1869-1877), was the general most responsible for the military defeat of the rebelling Southern states during the Civil War

(1861-1865). Suffering severe pain from throat cancer, Grant died just three days after finishing his fascinating memoir of the Civil War, which I just finished reading.

I quote one paragraph of Grant's memoir of over 500 pages, in which he ponders a topic so much in the news today, race relations:

"It is possible that the question of a conflict between races may come up in the future, as did that between freedom and slavery before. The condition of the colored man within our borders may become a source of anxiety, to say the least. But he was brought to our shores by compulsion, and he now should be considered as having as good a right to remain here as any other class of our citizens."

Grant portends "conflict between races." How disappointed he would be, that 156 years after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and 125 years after Grant wrote the passage above, many of our "colored" citizens in the United States have not yet achieved the rights of "any other class of citizens."

Gary Dielman
Baker City

A grisly reading tour of our national parks

There are quite a few ways to get yourself killed in a national park. More ways than I imagined. Although I don't recall that I ever devoted much thought to the matter, being neither a frequent national park visitor nor especially morbid.

(There is only one national park in Oregon, after all — Crater Lake.)

But I have recently had occasion to ponder this grisly topic while making a sort of literary tour through some of the more famous national parks in the West.

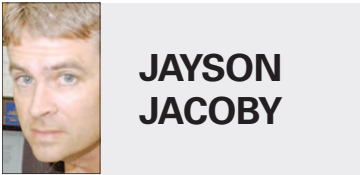
The volumes that have captivated me over the past month or so are not, I suspect, ones that tourism promotion agencies in the Yellowstone, Grand Canyon or Yosemite regions would encourage visitors to consult before scheduling their vacations.

But with titles such as "Over the Edge: Death in Grand Canyon," I could no more avoid these chronicles than I could turn off "Strawberry Fields Forever" at the 1-minute mark, where the Beatles' producer, George Martin, and studio engineer Geoff Emerick almost seamlessly spliced together two takes of the song recorded at slightly different tempos.

"Death in Grand Canyon" is one in a series of books, much like, say, "The Bobbsey Twins" is a series of books.

There are other similarities. In both series, multiple authors rather than a single writer are responsible for the books.

And just as the two sets of fictional fraternal twins — Nan and Bert, and Flossie and Freddie — get into predicaments, so too do national park visitors.



JAYSON JACOBY

The comparison, I'll concede, is sketchy beyond those basic facts. None of the Bobbsey Twins, so far as I remember, ever plunged off a 1,000-foot cliff while maneuvering for a scenic photograph at the Grand Canyon.

Nor did any of the quartet ever blunder into a boiling geyser at Yellowstone.

The national parks books, however, teem with such deadly misadventures.

I bought what apparently was the originator of the genre — "Death in Yellowstone: Accidents and Foolhardiness in the First National Park" — several years ago.

My family got to talking about the book while driving to the mountains for a hiking trip this spring and the conversation piqued my curiosity.

I remembered that there was at least one other similar book, dealing with deaths in Grand Canyon National Park.

When we returned home my daughter, Olivia, whose facility with navigating Amazon.com is deeply disturbing in multiple respects, most notably financial, quickly procured both that book and another, "Off the Wall: Death In Yosemite."

I was especially interested in these books because I have visited all three of the titular parks, although I don't recall sustaining even so much as a blister at any of them.

The topic is distasteful, certainly.

The authors in their introductions seek to deflect the obvious criticism — that they're profiting from tragedies — by pointing out that most fatalities in the parks were preventable, and that the books, by reminding visitors of sensible precautions, could save lives in the future.

This contention, however self-serving, is reasonable — not least because it's almost certainly true.

And indeed the litany of disasters described in the books include very few that could fairly be described as accidents, in the sense that the victims could not have anticipated the danger — a hiker killed by a falling rock, for instance.

Rather, the subtitle of "Death in Yellowstone" by Lee H. Whitlesley contains the word that best summarizes this awful roster of incidents — foolhardiness.

There is a depressing commonality to the cases the authors describe in some detail (each chapter, which deals with a particular type of incident, such as falls, or death by exposure, concludes with a complete list of deaths but in summary form).

This induces a kind of fatigue.

You know how each story is going to turn out — with somebody dead or at least horribly hurt.

Yet I felt compelled to keep reading mainly because so many of the people were just out for a hike, not engaged in some obviously hazardous pursuit, and as an avid hiker myself I could easily put myself in their boots.

It was easy enough to comfort myself when reading about those who made blatantly bad decisions. People who, for instance, diverted

from a maintained trail onto terrain that, in places such as the Grand Canyon and Yosemite, almost immediately becomes the province of expert mountaineers.

But quite a few of the victims did nothing extraordinarily stupid.

Rather, they just underestimated the danger of, for instance, the terrible heat of a Grand Canyon summer, and the immense physical demands it places on even a well-conditioned hiker.

I believe that in this respect in particular the authors' justification of their topic — that the books are as much about preserving life as describing death — rings true.

I even had occasion recently to consider how meager the difference can be between a perfectly safe hike and a potentially lethal one.

I don't intend to exaggerate, to be sure.

The experience was annoying rather than truly dangerous, and in no way comparable to any of the anecdotes in the Grand Canyon book.

What happened is that I went for a hike on a Saturday with my wife, Lisa, and Olivia. We drove Lisa's dad's side-by-side up Connor Creek, a tributary of the Snake River in eastern Baker County, and then hiked in moderately steep country on a warm but not oppressive afternoon.

On the drive back we had a flat tire.

Seriously flat — a section of the tread looked as though someone had slashed it with the sort of knife featured in a movie that spawns multiple sequels.

We were in a canyon where cell signals fail to penetrate.

Lacking a spare, we started walking toward the Snake River Road, about 2 miles away.

This is an easy walk, downhill all the way. And the temperature was maybe in the low 80s.

But we had already drunk all our water.

And I was more than ready to down another pint or so.

I had my portable filter so were able to safely sip from Connor Creek, which parallels the road and which we actually had to splash across twice.

This was, then, nothing at all comparable to being caught halfway up the South Rim of the Grand Canyon with no water, and no stream or spring nearby, on a July afternoon when the temperature is 110 in the shade.

But the circumstances — running out of the water we had brought, and having an unexpected problem that forced us to walk farther than we expected to — inevitably made me think of all the tragic episodes I had recently read about.

I was plenty warm as we walked, and as we waited for Lisa's parents to arrive from their cabin just a couple miles away.

But even so I felt a figurative shiver as I thought about how different it would be if I were in that other canyon. I thought of staggering in the sun, bottles empty, as the life-sustaining moisture dripped from my chin, immediately evaporating on the hot dust, leaving no trace that it had ever been there.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.